Introduction

The Yellowstone River is the longest free-flowing river in the contiguous United States. It flows for six hundred seventy miles from it's headwaters in the Absaroka Mountains in northern Wyoming to it's juncture with the Missouri River in western North Dakota. Lewis and Clark descended much of the Yellowstone River during their Voyage of Discovery in 1806. The upper Yellowstone River within Park County, Montana is one of the west's premier native trout fisheries and supports populations of cutthroat trout. It also supports and regenerates stands of riparian cottonwood forest and provides habitat for neo-tropical migrant bird species. Flooding in 1996 and 1997 caused property damage with subsequent increases in channel modification activities. Given the resource significance of this area, issues have been raised regarding the effects of bank stabilization and long term cumulative impacts. Landowners and municipalities have attempted to prevent or reduce flooding and erosion through bank stabilization structures involving rock riprap and channel deflection using rock barbs. The Governor's Upper Yellowstone River Task Force was formed in November of 1997 to address the cumulative effects of existing and proposed channel modifications and to provide a cooperative forum for local comprehensive planning. Permitting agencies such as the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with other Federal, state and local agencies, and private individuals require knowledge of this upper reach of the river to assist in deciding what effects these channel modifications will have on domestic, recreational and wildlife resources. A resource inventory of current habitat and land use along the river is the important first step in the development of comprehensive resource management plans and future decision making.

Debris deposited on a gravel bar during high flows on the Yellowstone River.